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Permissions Department
ACMRS
Arizona State University
PO Box 4402
Tempe, AZ 85287-4402

Tel. 480-965-5900 Fax 480-965-1681 acmrs@asu.edu

Arizona Center for
Medieval & Renaissance Studies

Travels on the Sea and in the Mind

Martin Carver

Introduction

Let's agree that the extent to which the Anglo-Saxons used the seas would depend on whether they knew how to do it, and whether they wanted to; in other words on the viability of ocean voyages on the one hand, and the imperatives operating on the other. The ease and urgency of sea crossings is important to us, since these things will help us decide on whether we have to deal with an inward-looking or an outward-looking community, whether migration is likely, whether contact is frequent, whether ideas from the Continent, Scandinavia, and Ireland are the subject of detailed debate or vague rumor in the English courts. And we must be sensitive to the likelihood that the use of the sea, and Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards it, changed through the six or seven hundred years covered by our interests. In this vast subject, I will confine myself to material evidence; but that does not mean we need to discuss only practical matters. Material evidence also reveals ways of thinking and attitudes of mind, which in turn imply spiritual relationships as well as reified dreams, of which the most evocative example is ship burial.

The Maritime Theatre

The Anglo-Saxons found themselves on an island surrounded by three seas. Each of these seas had been regularly crossed during the Bronze Age, and perhaps as early as the Mesolithic, so we are not concerned with discovery or a first landfall, but with an evolving practice.[1] The natural conditions are different in each of our

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[1] For an excellent review of boats and seafaring in the west, see G. J. Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic* (Woodbridge, 1980). Barry Cunliffe's surveys are most

Stacy S. Klein, William Schipper, and Shannon Lewis-Simpson, eds., *The Maritime World of the Anglo-Saxons.* Essays in Anglo-Saxon Studies, vol. 5. MRTS 448. Tempe: ACMRS, 2014. [ISBN 978-0-86698-496-6]

three seas, and in consequence, so are the navigational practices and the boats. On the Irish Sea, travel is characterized by short-haul pottering between beaches on rocky foreshores and islands, and there are numerous inshore lakes and narrow necks of land inviting portages. Journeys offer a few long runs and numerous byways. We hear of hide boats with sails from the Iron Age, and from early medieval Irish documents we pick up tales of navigation by island-hopping. In open water, the sailors followed the geese, by sight and sound, north in spring and south in autumn.[2] The natural axis of this sea-lane is north-south, one which, as Barry Cunliffe has pointed out, provided an ideologically unified community from the coasts of Spain and Brittany to Ireland, Wales, western Scotland, and the northern Isles.[3] These "Gulf-streamers" first expressed their ideological cohesion in megaliths, but it will not have escaped the casual observer that later religious affiliations also shared this corridor. It is not impossible, as I have argued elsewhere, that the Christian churches of the west in the seventh century owed their divergence on the tonsure and the date of Easter to the prehistoric traditions of the Irish Sea peoples.[4]

The burden of this argument is that on its west side Britain had a coherent maritime community that differed from that of those living on the east side, whoever they were. On the eastern side of the island, in the North Sea or German Sea, was a fiercer environment with longer hauls and fewer larger areas of protected water—firths in the north, estuaries in the south—which can naturally collect and canalize deep-water traffic. The winds in the North Sea are pretty variable but, if it is legitimate to average the wind roses of the Admiralty charts, they appear to favor sailings from Scandinavia to Britain.[5] In other words, a mariner from Norway or Denmark with a sail would, in general, find favorable winds in spring to take him to Britain, and favorable winds in autumn to take him back home. Thus the crossing of the North Sea favors Scandinavian mariners; and British maritime communities will flourish best in estuarine situations (Forth, Humber, and Thames) and between the closer coasts of the Channel. I am not saying that history is determined by such things, but perhaps some influence on its course should be allowed.

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useful for sea travel in the Atlantic and Mediterranean: Barry Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean: The Atlantic and its Peoples* (Oxford, 2001); idem, *Europe Between the Oceans. Themes and Variations: 9000 BC– AD 1000* (New Haven, 2008), 437.

[2] Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic*, 9–10.

[3] Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*, 558.

[4] Martin Carver, "Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves," in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. E. Tyler (Woodbridge, 2000), 25–48; idem, "Early Scottish Monasteries and Prehistory: A Preliminary Dialogue", *Scottish Historical Review* 88 (2009): 332–51.

[5] Martin Carver, "Pre-Viking Traffic in the North Sea," in *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons*, ed. S. McGrail, CBA Research Report 71 (London, 1990), 117–25.

Navigation, it has been argued, is not a serious problem, since from any point in western Scandinavia the island of Britain is hard to miss.[6] Nevertheless, folklore tells us about following fish and the birds and the mother swell and, when near land, of listening to the characteristic noise of the sea breaking on a particular piece of coast by putting one's ear to the gunwale. We also make assumptions about early medieval use of the sun and stars to gauge latitude. These assumptions seem reasonable because we know that throughout the Roman period, the peoples of Britain were in routine contact with mariners from the Mediterranean where such methods of navigation were routine.[7]

The earliest boats in the North Sea region, like those of the westerners, seem to have been made of stitched and caulked hide stretched on a frame as in the Bronze Age Hjortspring boat, but by the fourth century AD we have boats in which hides have been replaced by timber planks. The planks are still stitched together and caulked, and then lashed to an inserted timber frame. In practice this stitching and lashing was such an ingrained practice for the North Sea boatbuilders that they were still lashing hulls to the frames of Viking ships, even when the hull was being fashioned from overlapping planks fastened by iron rivets. Nydam, Kvalsund, and Oseberg, the principal preserved ship finds, provide an iconic succession, forming the basis of an expectation for an evolution of ship technology: boats that are rowed, boats that may have a sail, and boats that did have a sail.[8] We get very useful ideas about how these vessels were used by replicating and sailing them—an art in which the staff of the ship museum at Roskilde is pre-eminent.[9]

From such exercises we learn that sewn and lashed ships are extraordinarily flexible, they writhe and bend in the water like serpents—those carved stem posts are suggestive in more ways than one. Yet they are also slow and heavy to row, and a full complement of rowers is required along the gunwale to move forward or to prevent sternway or leeway: going backwards or sideways with the wind. Provided one is travelling with the wind, then a sail is the answer, and we

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[6] Carver, "Pre-Viking Traffic," and references passim.

[7] Although latitude may have been determined mainly by dead reckoning or by marking the height of the sun on the mast, at least one instrument, the sun compass from Uunartoq, Greenland, has survived; first interpreted as a sun compass in 1953, it has now been restored and tested. See Søren Thirslund, *Viking Navigation* (Roskilde, 2007).

[8] Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Athena Trakadas, eds., *Hjortspring: A Pre-Roman Iron-Age Warship in Context* (Roskilde, 2003); Crumlin-Pedersen, *Viking-Age Ships and Ship-building in Hedeby/Haithabu and Schleswig* (Copenhagen, 1997), 18–20; Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic*, 35.

[9] Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, "Experimental Archaeology and Ships—Principles, Problems and Examples," in *Connected by the Sea: Proceedings of the Tenth International Symposium on Boat and Ship Archaeology, Roskilde 2003,* ed. Lucy Blue, Fred Hocker, and Anton Englert (Oxford, 2006), 1–7.

should remind ourselves that in spite of the evolutionary model just mentioned, the sail was not invented by the Vikings: sails had been seen in the three seas round Britain since the Iron Age and certainly in the Roman period. The fourth-century Roman wreck "Blackfriars 1" had a sail, and Sean McGrail has proposed a whole succession of "Romano-Celtic" boats, which were flat-bottomed cargo carriers with sails plying the Channel in the early first millennium AD.[10] In fact *any* boat can be sailed in a following wind, but only in one direction. The linguist Katrin Their argues that the word for sail (*segh**), and by implication the technology of sailing, existed in Celtic and West German languages *before* the Anglo-Saxons notionally began to settle in Britain in the fifth century.[11] If there is an evolutionary factor to be chronicled here, it is not the use of the sail, but the ability to tack.

My personal experiences of investigating the art of tacking took place on a replica of the Oseberg ship, launched as *Dronningen* (Queen) and renamed the *Edda*.[12] The original ship was buried in the early ninth century at Oseberg on the Oslo fjord, possibly to contain the body of Queen Åse, mother of Halvdan the Black. Found sealed beneath a mound of blue clay in an excellent state of preservation, the ship with its rich cargo of grave goods was excavated by Gabriel Gustafson in 1904.[13] It had a step for a mast but the mast itself was incomplete, inviting rival theories about how tall it was—and in consequence how big the sail should be. The Viking rule of thumb was thought to be that the mast should be the same length as the measurement round the hull amidships. An alternative guide, used in this case, was that the height of the mast would be given by extrapolating the angles of the stem and stern stays. I mention this because, in the view of Arne-Emil Christensen (former Director of the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo), our sail was too big.

In its burial pit, Oseberg had a number of timber features, the use of which was not immediately evident: two pairs of timber sockets fastened to the inner hull forward from the mast, and a long pole. Since the end of this pole fitted into the sockets, it was inferred that this must be a spar for holding the throat of the sail outboard in a following wind so that it could increase the pull—like a spin-

[10] Sean McGrail, "Romano-Celtic Boats and Ships: Characteristic Features," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 24.2 (1995): 139–45.

[11] Katrin Their, "Sails in the North—New Perspectives on an Old Problem," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 32.2 (2003): 182–90; eadem, "Ships and their Terminology Between England and the North," in *Anglo-Saxons and the North*, ed. M. Kilpiö et al., MRTS 364 (Tempe, 2009), 151–64; William Sayers, "Sails in the North: Further Linguistic Considerations," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 33 (2004): 348–50, at 348.

[12] Martin Carver, "On and Off the Edda," in *Ship-shape: Essays for Ole Crumlin-Pedersen*, ed. O. Olsen, J. S. Madsen, and F. Riek (Roskilde, 1995), 305–12.

[13] A.W. Brøgger, H. J. Falk, and H. Shetelig, *Osebergfundet* (Kristiania, 1917).

naker. It was also surmised that the pole could hold a leading edge of the square sail forward in position when the boat was headed close to the wind. If the center of the sail was tied to the mast, then this "tacking spar" could present the wind with something resembling a jib. This was the important experiment we were destined to try. Incidentally, when rigged like this the sail looks triangular, as was noted in the fourth- to sixth-century Kelenderis ship, which nevertheless had a square, rather than a lateen, sail.[14]

Oseberg had oar ports along each side, covered by timber flaps which were supposed to close when there was no oar in them, and we carried tons of ballast in the form of blue plastic sacks full of sand. The steering oar on the starboard side was secured to a wooden boss by a twisted root. The ship had no keel, so when the sail was hoisted it took off like a rocket—providing a most exhilarating ride. When the ship was steered into the wind, the wind attempted to push it over, and water came through the oar ports into the hold, where it was soaked up by the ballast. As our tacking experiments proceeded, our freeboard got steadily lower in the water. The tacking spar did succeed in creating a little jib-like envelope that took us quite near to the wind, but every time it veered, the ship would heel over precariously and threaten to capsize us. The vessel righted itself because the person holding the rope attached to the end of the sail (i.e., the sheet) would be pulled across the deck and the wind could then spill out. However, rather than being pulled across the deck, at one point the skipper decided to secure the sheet in a cleat. This was a mistake; the hand-held sheet acted as a safety valve, but the cleated sheet could not escape, and over we went. An open-decked vessel sinks with surprising speed leaving little on the surface but flotsam and very cold people. How many fatal dramas of this kind must have been enacted in the North Seas fjords, firths, and estuaries in the early Middle Ages!

There was much discussion of the technical causes of the disaster: the sail was too big, the mast too long, the horsehair stays not tight, and so on. But it is of course possible to capsize any boat or ship, especially one without a deep-weighted keel. What the experiment revealed, at least to me, was that the important factor was not mechanical design, but the development of a skill. The early days of tacking must have been comparable to the early days of hang-gliding: there is no reason why it should not work, but the route to success is littered with accidents.

The viability of tacking is a key factor in the social use of the sea. If a ship cannot make any headway against the wind using a sail, then it requires a large complement of rowers to move it; the ship is then full of crew. If it can make to the wind, even a little, then a smaller crew can take a large ship across the sea and come back laden with goods. The ability to tack controls the jump in the social trajectory from a dependency on crews of warriors or slaves to the liberation of

[14] Zaraza Friedman and Levent Zoroglu, "Kelenderis Ship—Square or Lateen Sail?" *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 35 (2006): 108–16, at 108.

small groups of entrepreneurs. Alec Tilley makes the same point in his discussion of sailing in the Mediterranean: "The purpose of being able to make some way to windward was to enable mariners to go to sea without depending on oars and shipwrights to build large beamy ships capable of carrying a large cargo with a small crew."[15] Recent discussion about when this was achieved in the North Sea favors the ninth to eleventh centuries. We do not have to wait until the invention of the cog in the late twelfth century and the exertions of the Hanseatic League. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen argues that although we mustn't call them cogs, large Nordic cargo ships carrying bulk cargoes were plying the waters of the North Sea and Baltic Sea at least from the eleventh century, and the Romano-Celtic cargo vessels were of course much earlier.[16] Since we have so few surviving vessels, the jury must remain out. But we can say that while sail was always a possibility from the fourth century, the opening up of the oceans to long-distance cargo-carrying by sailing to windward was probably, in the main, a contribution of Viking seamanship.

Coastal Traffic

Scholarly emphasis on the large ships has tended to obscure the roles of numerous short journeys in small boats. We have seen some of these small boats in burials of the sixth and seventh centuries, as at Slüsegård and Snape, where they appear as shell structures probably of bark about 3m long, and later as *faerings*—four-oared vessels. Some examples of these were found with a larger ship, the Gokstad ship, implying their role as dinghies to make landfalls in shallow water.[17] It is legitimate to imagine the rivers, lakes, and estuaries as thronging with these small personal craft, small enough and light enough to be carried by their crew when the water ran out.

The picture of hectic inshore maritime traffic has been enhanced still further by research that has been initiated on either side of the Channel in recent years, showing the extent of tidal creeks which lattice the flatter coasts—the veins of communication feeding the arteries of the seas. As Chris Loveluck and Dries Tys have shown in Flanders, these tidal creeks alter our understanding of

[15] Alec Tilley, "Sailing to Windward in the Ancient Mediterranean," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 23.4 (1994): 309–13.

[16] Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, "To Be or Not to Be a Cog: The Bremen Cog in Perspective," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 29.2 (2000): 230–46; McGrail, "Romano-Celtic Boats."

[17] Jon Seal, "Building a Copy of the Gokstad Faering," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 32.2 (2003): 238–45.

the permanence of coastal settlement quite radically.[18] Traditionally this coastline has been seen as subject to marine transgression and sea level changes which drove settlement off the flats. But according to the new interpretation, drawn from sediment cores collected by Cecile Baeteman and linked in turn to high resolution radiocarbon dates, the coastal plain remained permanently settled on stable sites from the fourth to the seventeenth centuries. The implication is dramatic. The initial sandy islands of settlement expanded until, in the tenth through eleventh centuries, the Counts of Flanders accelerated the process by building dykes. But at this stage at least the purpose was not protection from the sea but the service of new policies of landscape organization and social control. The mapping of tidal creeks is naturally seen as a key strategy for finding boats, discovering where settlements lay, and exploring the extent of their communication networks.

Such networks raise thoughts about the resurgence of towns and trade, so often seen as a dramatic rebirth of the later seventh century, inspired by strong leaders or Christian *realpolitik*.[19] But the new work implies there is already a maritime nursery of economic and social exchange in action along the northwest coast of the Continent during the fourth to sixth centuries. This confirms what I, for one, have long suspected: that exchange and traffic are both lively and continuous throughout the early Saxon period, but diminished in volume and changed in their axes as a result of Christianization. The appearance of the monasteries (such as Jarrow) and trading centers (or *wics,* such as Hamwih, Lundenwic, Ipswich, Eoforwic*)* in the eighth century does not necessarily mark an upthrust of sea traffic or trade, but rather its canalization in the interests of regulation, tax, state profiteering, and restrictive practice.[20]

Note that the further north we travel in Britain, the less this putative mudflat settlement system is likely to obtain. The coastal lands are less friendly, the approaches more severe. John Makepeace, a student of the Anglo-Saxons and a lifelong yachtsman, explained that there are only a few dozen havens along the coast of Northumbria—none of them easy—and the majority coincide with monastic sites: for example, Tynemouth, Jarrow, Wearmouth, Whitby, and Hartlepool.[21] At Jarrow, as late as 1693, the monastery stood by the Slake, a large safe

[18] Chris Loveluck and Dries Tys, "Coastal Societies, Exchange and Identity Along the Channel and Southern North Sea Shores of Europe, AD 600–1000," *Journal of Marine Archaeology* 1 (2006): 140–69.

[19] Richard Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement* (London, 1989), 69–114.

[20] For Jarrow, see Rosemary Cramp, *Wearmouth and Jarrow Monastic Sites* (London, 2005); for a recent overview of *wics* and other trading sites see Tim Pestell and Katharina Ulmschneider, eds., *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and 'Productive' Sites, 650–850* (Macclesfield, 2003).

[21] John Makepeace, "Early Medieval Harbours in Northumbria" (master's thesis, Centre for Medieval Studies, University of York, 1995).

harbor that was covered twice a day by the tide and provided turning for shallow-draft vessels, as well as a place for seasoning timbers. This fine tidal harbor has now been covered up by a massive park for newly manufactured cars.

The front door to Bernicia, for the modern yachtsman at least, is neither Bamburgh nor Lindisfarne, but Budle Bay which lies between them. A little way up the Budle River is the start of the ancient roadway that leads to Yeavering, site of the famous seventh-century Anglo-British palace, *Ad Gefrin*.[22] In general, the sailing times are not prohibitive. Wearmouth is two hours from Jarrow and it is theoretically possible to reach Budle Bay, Yeavering, and Lindisfarne from Wearmouth in a day. There is no need to conceive of Jarrow and Lindisfarne as significantly separated by geography. The journey from the Humber to the Forth—the whole coast of greater Northumbria—can be sailed in a yacht in 32 hours, say, three days: Northumbria was a kingdom that could be unified by boat.

Table 1:
Sailing times on the Northumbrian coast (after Makepeace 1995) assuming steady wind on the starboard quarter (easterly) and a speed of 5 knots.

Humber to Scarborough 9.5 hours	Wearmouth to Budle Bay 10 hours
Scarborough to Whitby 2.5 hours	Budle Bay to St. Abbs 4 hours
Whitby to Wearmouth 7 hours	St. Abbs to The Forth 3 hours
Wearmouth to Jarrow 2 hours	Humber to the Forth 36 hours

Imperatives and Attitudes

The second part of this paper considers more hypothetical and then more emotional questions about how the Anglo-Saxons related to the sea. What made them go on it? What kept them away? Which journeys were undertaken? How did the maritime relationship wax and wane, and why? My reasoning will be almost entirely archaeological, that is, inferred from material evidence. If this results in consensus with more text-based scholars, working in disciplines such as literature and history, that will be pleasing; if it leads to different conclusions, I hope we will greet this as the kind of anomaly from which new insights spring.

In Northumbria, the viability of religious associations and of territories was dependent on such physical factors as the ease of communication, which in turn depended on the nautical technology, tides, wind, and navigation. We have probably discussed these enough to see that the Anglo-Saxon coastline is potentially a very busy place, full of local and overseas traffic, a variety of ships and boats manned by mariners undertaking blue-water crossings across the North Sea and

[22] Brian Hope-Taylor, *Yeavering: An Anglo-British Centre of Early Northumbria* (London, 1977).

numerous shorter trips in estuaries and tidal creeks. However, the key word here is "potentially." When we examine the terrestrial evidence for the movement of people and goods along the coast, we find that it is rather particular. The evidence tells us that although the potential existed for sea travel all around the island, it did not actually happen: there were preferred routes and distinctive attitudes that changed with time. There are thus other factors at work. History is not caused by geography, since geography, including the sea level, was relatively static. The imperative for change must lie elsewhere in the realm of ideas and politics, and in the mysterious alignments and allegiances fostered there.

I propose to offer three case studies that may provide insight into the Anglo-Saxon maritime mind-set. First, I will consider variations in overseas contact and their broader implications; second, I will explore the maritime messages embedded in ship burial; and, finally I will comment briefly on the Late Saxon map in Cotton Tiberius B. v in the light of known voyages at the time. The objective will be to identify examples of attitude and agency that illuminate the changing nature of a salt-water relationship long thought to be fundamental to the English.

Changing Contact

Those who study maritime space know that there are several different imperatives persuading people to cross the sea: migration, conquest, trade, enslavement, and religious mission are examples. And they are also aware that archaeologists have great difficulty trying to tell the difference between them. The debate about Anglo-Saxon immigration continues: some remain in no doubt that large numbers of Germans arrived on the east coast of Britain in the fifth century as implied by Bede's narrative and the similarity of grave goods on either side of the North Sea.[23] Others prefer to give the Britons agency and allow them to realign for political or ideological reasons with their neighbors, without a need for large-scale migration.[24] Others like to see a few powerful Saxons invading first the land and then the gene pool, to create a DNA descendancy related to that of northern Europe, without having to invoke large numbers crossing the sea.[25]

We could try to escape the pendulum that swings between single causes, by looking at the sea rather than the land. If sea travel was indeed feasible and

[23] See Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*, 454; idem, *Europe Between the Oceans,* 419; idem, *Britain Begins* (Oxford, 2013), 401–46; G Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford, 2013), 184–252.

[24] Sam Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death* (London, 2000); Catherine Hills, *Origins of the English* (London, 2003).

[25] M. G. Thomas, M. P. H. Stumpf, and H. Härke, "Evidence for an Apartheid-like Social Structure in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, Series B, 273 (2006): 2651–57.

frequent in the first millennium AD, and many scholars believe that it was, then the most fruitful targets of research are not territories at all but maritime spaces.[26] The western, eastern, and southern seas, those that border Britain, are potentially social arenas themselves, each with a unique agenda and historical trajectory. We can see this, for example, in the finds of imported Mediterranean red slip ware and amphorae of the sixth century, which illuminate a route up the Irish Sea.[27] The supply is succeeded in the seventh century by imports from Aquitaine—but still following the same western seaway. Technically there is nothing to stop a sea captain with a load of Mediterranean pottery turning right at the Scilly Islands and appearing in London or York, as the Romans did before them. But they did not—this pottery does not appear in Anglo-Saxon England in any quantities that could allow us to believe in a supply. The supply is thus deliberately targeted, and where pots could go, people could go too.

The implication of this western communication zone is that the Irish and the Welsh did not need missionaries to find out about the Mediterranean world—home of Christianity, the pope, the Byzantine empire, and the Greek and Latin languages—since they already enjoyed a long-term contact with it. If the old megalithic seaway is operating, then Irishmen and Britons will have visited the Mediterranean, and Mediterranean people will be visitors to the courts of Connaught, Powys, or Dálriata. We can also follow Ewan Campbell's claim that the west of Scotland was not invaded by the Irish, bringing Irish kingship, Columba, and Christianity.[28] The Irish and the western Scots were simply the same maritime people in contact with each other since the Bronze Age or before. The course of history is therefore not determined by migration, but by the ideas of the indigenous people, stimulated by travel, visitors, and imported red plates (African Red Slip Ware).

Now let's cross to the other side of the island and the eastern sea. Our distributions here show that objects—glass in this case—are travelling across the sea, with a certain emphasis, indicating a certain *valency* to use a chemical term, between the east coast of Britain, western Scandinavia, and the Rhineland. There is a maritime system operating in the east, just as it does in the west, and Britain is a land of two halves with their backs to each other. In this part of Europe at least, this is not so much an age of migrations as an age of maritime communities, in which Scots and Irish on the one side and Frisians and Angles on the

[26] Carver, "Pre-Viking Traffic"; Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, "Maritime Aspects of the Archaeology of Roman and Migration-Period Denmark," in *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200*, ed. idem (Roskilde, 1991), 41–54; C. Westerdahl, "Norrlandsleden: The Maritime Cultural Landscape of the Norrland Sailing Route," in *Aspects of Maritime Scandinavia AD 200–1200*, ed. Crumlin-Pedersen, 105–20; idem, ed., *The Significance of Portages*, BAR International 1499 (London, 2006).

[27] Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*, 481.

[28] Ewan Campbell, "Were the Scots Irish?" *Antiquity* 75 (2001): 285–92.

other are building confederations connected by trade, intermarriage, and belief. As Catherine Hills has long insisted and Chris Loveluck is showing anew, the sixth century was a period of multiple exchanges between multiple centers all along the North Sea coast and in the Danish archipelago.[29]

Ship Burials and Early Kingdoms

In a new study of the sixth century, the changes in territorial allegiance and the upsurge of maritime traffic were attributed largely to the rise of the Merovingian kingdom, although it is less clear what caused the Merovingian rise itself.[30] This line of thinking underestimates the previous vigor of sea travel in the fifth and sixth centuries. Nevertheless, by the year 600 the combination of Frankish ambition, the return of the Roman Empire as a model, and the Christian mission was provoking the formation of land-based territories. In Britain these were normally Iron Age and Roman territories redefined: Kent and East Anglia, for example, being successors to *civitates*.[31] Each was shortly to acquire Christian leaders, taxation, and the *wic*.

As the English retrenched from their membership in the maritime community during this turbulent period, it is interesting to reflect on one of the most extraordinary phenomena amongst the mortuary practices of the island, namely the brief flowering of ship burial in East Anglia. We have very few sites—Sutton Hoo, Snape, and Caistor. There are hints of Bronze Age boat-shaped containers in Britain, but no continuing "tradition" to draw on. The situation is equally discontinuous on the Continent: fifth- and sixth-century burials on Bornholm, attributed to pagan priests, and a few early examples on the Channel coast, such as the fabulously preserved Falward. A diffusionary model is not really appropriate for this evidence, so we are looking for other imperatives and other contexts to help explain why, at this time of all times, an investment in burial ships in East Anglia was thought to be necessary or desirable.[32]

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[29] Hills, *Origins of the English*; Loveluck and Tys, "Coastal Societies."

[30] Ulf Näsman, "The Justinianic Era of South Scandinavia," in *The Sixth Century: Production, Distribution and Demand,* ed. Richard Hodges and William Bowden, The Transformation of the Roman World 3 (Leiden, 1998), 255–78; Chris Wickham, "Overview: Production, Distribution and Demand," in *The Sixth Century*, 279–92.

[31] Martin Carver, "What Were They Thinking? Intellectual Territories in England," in *Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (hereafter *OHASA*), ed. Helena Hamerow, David Hinton, and Sally Crawford (Oxford, 2011), 914–47, esp. 935–41.

[32] Martin Carver, "Ship Burial in Early Britain: Ancient Custom or Political Signal?" in *The Ship as Symbol in Prehistoric and Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and B. Munch Thye (Copenhagen, 1995), 111–24.

It is generally accepted that high-investment burial, involving the expenditure of major resources, reflects ideas of great importance at the time, and that at this level of investment we can expect compositions drawing on intellectual potency and political intention. In other words, you don't do ship burial by mistake, or as a casual aside: the meaning is immediate, if implicit. A burial like Sutton Hoo Mound 1 is complex and contains so many allusions that it is no simple reflection of the society that built it, or of their religion or even their culture. It is a unique creation of its time and context, like a poem, by which the "authors" of the burial rite express their hopes and fears of the future by making numerous references to archaic, neighboring, or admired cultures.[33] In this reading, the exact meaning of each artifact is often hidden from us, because it varies with context. Thus interpreting the use of a ship as a direct reference to Beowulf, or to the immigration of the family from across the sea, or even to an imaginary journey back to the homeland undertaken at death, all seem improbable, or at least insufficient. Significant for the interpretation is the role of the ship in a wider shared mythology, perhaps going back into the Bronze Age iconography recently studied by John Coles, Richard Bradley, and Flemming Kaul.[34] Christer Westerdahl has shown that ritual and taboo feature in every part of the ship business, from selecting the timber and stepping the mast to launching the vessel and choosing the figurehead. For the latter, he points out that, for its figureheads, the Stone Age favored the elk, the Bronze Age the horse, and the Iron Age the dragon — all land-based animals whose job is to celebrate or protect sailors from the oppositions of sea and land.[35] Similarly Jon Henderson shows that Atlantic people invested in monuments on seaward promontories from the Neolithic well into the medieval period.[36]

The only continuity required here is an intellectual continuity; in other words, the adoption of narratives, that, like folktales, stay long in use, even where they have no material manifestations. I think we have to imagine a discourse widely shared, not narratives embedded in particular ethnic groups. What ship burial indicates is therefore a decision to reify a set of ideas that are already present in the common mind, but do not need monumentalizing until the appropriate moment. It is not excluded that among these ideas may be allegiance to Freyr or some other personage or even a reference to the Egyptian burial ships. Within

[33] Martin Carver, "Burial as Poetry: The Context of Treasure in Anglo-Saxon Graves," in *Treasure in the Medieval West*, ed. Elizabeth Tyler (Woodbridge, 2000), 25–48.

[34] See Richard Bradley, "Danish Razors and Swedish Rocks: Cosmology and the Bronze Age Landscape," *Antiquity* 80 (2006): 372–89.

[35] Christer Westerdahl, "Seal on Land, Elk at Sea: Notes On and Applications of the Ritual Landscape at the Seaboard," *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 34 (2005): 2–23; idem, *Significance of Portages*.

[36] Jon C. Henderson, *The Atlantic Iron Age: Settlement and Identity in the First Millennium BC* (London, 2007), 299–300.

the poetic reservoir on which these burials draw are many fantasies, many desires, and many fears. I don't believe the archaeology shows conservative traditions very often — and especially not here. Rather, the ship burials emerge in their seventh-century contexts as creative innovations, and it is therefore argued that they are saying something new, albeit using an archaic language.[37] The Sutton Hoo ship burials are the theosophical inventions of lively minds. In the light of the coming tight control of the *wic*, and the implied restrictions in travel, it is even possible to see the ship burials of East Anglia as a farewell to the freedom of movement and the beginning of a less poetic relationship with the ocean.

The Late Saxon Mariner and his World

My last example takes this idea a bit further. As already implied, the construction of the *wics*, for example at Lundenwic, Ipswich, Hamwih, and Eoforwic, represents a real sea-change, in which certain places are targeted for travel, along with, we must assume, a consequent reduction in casual exchanges in creeks and at beach markets. The method of loading and unloading is still tidal, making use of a river beach, such as The Strand in London. That the object is to increase revenue is implied by the ordered street plan at Hamwih, the provision of storehouses at London, the possible foreign cantonments at Ipswich, the provision of meat in cuts—as if to a garrison—at York.

The success of the venture in increasing cargo in the ninth century is conventionally signaled by Alfred's transfer of the landing point in London from the Strand into the old Roman city of London. There may be an ideological reason for this—as in the creation of the *burhs*, which emulated the network of Roman towns: a move back into the Roman capital indicated a move back into the Roman ethos as Alfred's family saw it. But there were practical factors too: use of a refurbished Roman dock meant that cargoes could always be landed, whatever the state of the tide. This new landing strategy implies that heavier vessels were plying the English seas, although few examples have been found on the English side of the North Sea. Following Crumlin-Pedersen we can see the merchants of Alfred's time advancing towards large deep-water ocean-going vessels, whose masters had begun to face the challenge of sailing near the wind with a square sail, presumably making use of a massive keel-plank and the dead weight of the hull.[38]

This kind of vessel went on long journeys from England to north Germany, Denmark, and Scandinavia, as we learn from the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan. Recent publications edited by Anton Englert offer us a thrilling analysis of both of these travelers. The journeys recounted by the Norwegian Ohthere

[37] See Carver, "Ship Burial in Early Britain"; idem, "Burial as Poetry"; and idem, *Sutton Hoo: A Seventh-Century Princely Burial Ground and its Context* (London, 2005), 489–503.

[38] Crumlin-Pedersen, "To Be or Not To Be a Cog," 241 and 244.

(Ottar) to King Alfred show the viable routeways of the fur trade, and its principal route, the North Way (i.e., the coast of Norway).[39] In pursuit of walrus, Ottar travelled from a home somewhere near the Lofoten Islands northwards around the North Cape, past the Varanger Fjord, and into the White Sea as far as the Varzuga River. On a second journey he travelled south along the coast, through the Skagerrak and Kattegat to Hedeby. For his part, Wulfstan reported a journey from Hedeby along the south Baltic coast to the mouth of the Vistula.[40]

We get a strong feeling that there was nothing abnormal about these journeys. Ottar made about 50–80 nautical miles a day, but spent much time waiting for a favorable wind.[41] His sailing season was May to October, and in the earlier and later months he would camp, presumably on land, every night. However, sailing in northern waters in July and August he could expect more than seventeen hours of daylight, so would not have to camp for long.[42] His ship has been judged by modern maritime experts to have resembled that found at Gokstad, with a crew sufficient to row in and out of harbor. But with all the crew and their provisions, he should still have been able to carry six tons of furs and tusks to Hedeby and more than recoup his investment and compensate for the dangers.[43]

It is interesting to compare these journeys (and the light they shed on the peoples of the north, the Finnas and the Beormas) with the rather different perception of maritime space revealed by the unique contemporary map that has survived as BL Cotton Tiberius B. v, fol. 56v.[44] Here we have a strange concoction, which, even when the names are written clearly, as David Hill has done for us, does not seem to belong to the world of the well-informed navigators that Ottar and Wulfstan knew. The map is thought to derive from a Roman original copied in the ninth century and modified in the eleventh century to reflect Archbishop Sigeric's journey to Rome in 990 via Pavia, Verona, and Lucca.[45] It refers to biblical cosmology, showing Noah's Ark, the crossing of the Red Sea, and nine of the twelve tribes of Israel. Its geography reflects that of Orosius and may even have shared a scriptorium with the production of the Old English version of Orosius in King Alfred's Winchester.[46] So we have to accept that the journeys of

[39] Janet Bately and Anton Englert, eds., *Ohthere's Voyages: A Late 9th Century Account of Voyages Along the Coasts of Norway and Denmark and its Cultural Context*, Maritime Cultures of the North 1 (Roskilde, 2007).

[40] Anton Englert and Athena Trakadas, eds., *Wulfstan's Voyage: The Baltic Sea Region in the Early Viking Age as Seen from Shipboard* (Roskilde, 2009).

[41] Englert and Trakadas, *Wulfstan's Voyage,* 44, 121.

[42] Englert and Trakadas, *Wulfstan's Voyage,* 46, 119.

[43] Englert and Trakadas, *Wulfstan's Voyage,* 115.

[44] David Hill, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1981), 2–3.

[45] Peter Barber, "Medieval Maps of the World," in *The Hereford World Map: Medieval World Maps and their Context*, ed. P. D. A. Harvey (London, 2006), 1–44, at 4–8.

[46] Bately and Englert, *Ohthere's Voyages,* 21.

both Ottar and the Tiberius map are representative, in their diverse way, of the changing interests of the English intelligentsia.

Drawing on New Media Theory and analogies from virtual reality, Martin K. Foys suggests that the Anglo-Saxon *mappa mundi* is best understood as a datascape, "a cartographic product that need not have correspondence with any real place on earth, but rather with imaginary places and circumstances made to seem real enough by an appeal to aspects of visual perception."[47] There is plainly a correspondence in this case with real places, but we can take the point that this is not a map needed by navigators, but is an expression of the intellectually knowable, the known unknowns.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the map is the apparent loss of sympathy with the Scandinavian seascape, now replaced in the affections and in the intellect with a mish-mash of tribes and wonders of the east, including the famous "here lions abound." The coasts of the Channel, the North Sea, and the Baltic are now mainly hidden in a fog of ignorance. Compare this vagueness with Ottar's and Wulfstan's descriptions, not to mention a presumed knowledge accumulated in the Anglo-Saxon homelands and by nearly two hundred years of Viking voyages in the three English seas, and indeed the north Atlantic.[48] It seems rather that the non-Christian travelers are being deliberately "unmapped," excluded from the new Anglo-Saxon version of history, and away in the same boat, so to speak, go the seafaring English. The map is not so much layered intellect, as naked propaganda.

One wonders whether the gulf between reality and perception was confined to the Christian spiritual leaders or whether it now afflicted the whole nation, which was in consequence learning to fear the sea. It is impossible not to feel that some important contact with the ocean has been lost. Away from the court and the cloisters, merchants and fishermen no doubt still routinely risked their lives. But the political fashions of the upper classes appear to have domesticated the insular sea space and made of it a literary confection; for them adventure lies in celebrating God's incomprehensible design in the abstract rather than His world and its peoples in reality.

The Future

The period from the fifth to the ninth centuries in maritime Britain was one of invention and energy—political, ideological, and nautical—even if we still know relatively little about it. Thanks to the exertions of the maritime center at Roskilde and the excavations of settlements in Greenland and Newfoundland,

[47] Martin K. Foys, *Virtually Anglo-Saxon: Old Media, New Media and Early Medieval Studies in the Late Age of Print* (Gainesville, 2007), 120.

[48] Marcus, *The Conquest of the North Atlantic*, 41.

no one doubts the seafaring brilliance of the early Scandinavians. But what happened to the English? It is almost as if they began to lose interest in the sea upon Christianization in the eighth century and stopped caring altogether at the point when the Vikings began raiding them. And yet this cannot be true. It is not enough to cite Alfred's founding of the British navy, his supposed creation of long ships and deep-water ports. Compared with the rediscovered ships and ports of Scandinavia, these things are inferential in the extreme.

Future research first demands release from outdated preoccupations with ethnicity, migration, invasion, and conversion. These paradigms need to be overtaken by those of intellectual diversity, social construction, entrepreneurial adventure, changing alliances, and the trafficking of people,[49] all resulting in sea crossings for many different purposes. In terms of making new physical discoveries, we are also stuck in the mud-flats. In comparison with our neighbors in Scandinavia and Continental Europe, Anglo-Saxon archaeologists lack their ship remains and the coastal settlement patterns. We have been timid about replication and experiment, and negligent of our own surviving ethnographic traditions.[50] We need knowledge of boats and landing places in use in Britain over the whole period between 400 and 1100 and our quest has become urgent—as coastlands, tidal creeks, and river banks bear the brunt of climatic and human pressure. However, things are stirring. Aware that the maritime archaeology of the Anglo-Saxons is trailing behind that of its peers, English Heritage in 2010 initiated an archaeological strategy for early medieval maritime Britain.[51] My hope is that in a few years' time you will see that we took up the challenges championed here, and explored the multiple trails left by Anglo-Saxon mariners.

[49] See M. McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy* (Cambridge, 2001), 738–52.

[50] Especially Sean McGrail, "Experimental Boat Archaeology: Has It a Future?" in *Connected by the Sea*, ed. Blue, Hocker, and Englert, 8–15; contrast with Crumlin-Pedersen, "Experimental Archaeology and Ships."

[51] The Maritime Research Strategy for England is a multi-period document being prepared by the University of Southampton, with the sponsorship of English Heritage.